

June 27, 2025

RE: proposed sell-off of millions of acres of public lands to address housing crisis

Dear Senators Thune, Schumer, Lee, and Heinrich,

As Congress considers proposals to address the housing crisis, it is critical that proposed solutions are grounded in evidence and long-term public interest. Recently, debate has focused on the argument that selling off federal public lands would be a viable way to address the housing affordability crisis. We, the undersigned environmental and housing justice organizations, write to express our opposition to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources title proposing the sale of millions of acres of public land. This proposal would have devastating impacts on U.S. efforts to preserve America's most precious resources without making any meaningful gains to address our affordable housing crisis.

The proposal included in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources title of the Senate's reconciliation bill would mandate the sale of 0.5% to 0.75% of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. While this may sound modest, conservation experts have analyzed the bill's criteria and estimate that it would open up to 250 million acres for potential sale across Western states—an unprecedented and sweeping divestment of public land. Of that, 3 million acres would be sold immediately. If enacted, this proposal would mark the first time in modern history that large portions of federal public land are sold into private ownership for profit.

While framed as a housing solution, the policy is neither targeted to produce affordable housing nor equipped to ensure equitable outcomes. Affordable housing cannot exist in a vacuum - building on sites without access to schools, groceries, healthcare, and employment without investments in infrastructure and community development gets us nowhere. People need new affordable developments in communities where they live and work.

Further, land near places like Zion National Park, Lake Tahoe, and Taos Ski Valley—areas known for their high-value recreational and luxury markets—would almost certainly be acquired by private developers or wealthy individuals. Any housing built in these areas would be speculative, high-end, and inaccessible to working families. In short, this land is unlikely to produce the affordable housing that is urgently needed.

Moreover, the financial structure of the proposal severely limits local benefit. Sales would be conducted at so-called “fair market value,” with only 5% of proceeds directed to local governments. The remaining revenue would flow to the federal Treasury, offering little return to the communities most affected by the loss of these lands.

This proposal fits a broader pattern of disinvestment from public ownership and massive government giveaways to corporations and the ultra-wealthy—coming at the expense of

ordinary Americans. Simultaneously, the proposed budget seeks to cut critical supports like Medicaid and SNAP, while suggesting that working families should foot the bill through the loss of public assets that belong to all Americans.

Public lands are a shared inheritance—irreplaceable, invaluable, and essential to our nation’s future. At a time when access to land, nature, and affordable housing is increasingly limited, selling off public lands is a permanent and misguided step in the wrong direction. We urge Congress to reject this proposal and instead focus on proven, equitable strategies that directly invest in affordable housing and community stability.

Sincerely,

National Housing Law Project

National Low Income Housing Coalition

Housing Assistance Council

Private Equity Stakeholder Project

Funders Together for Housing Justice

National Homelessness Law Center

Americans for Financial Reform

Race Forward

National Association of Social Workers